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ABSTRACT

An ethnographic study examined the practice of rituals as the pervasive form of communication at St. Mary's (a pseudonym) Catholic elementary school. Four specific rituals illustrate this communication process: morning assembly, "Pass the Pen," "Sparkles," and "Yes please/No thank-you." Morning assembly begins each school day, involving the entire student body and faculty. The other three rituals represent typical rituals of the fifth-grade class at St. Mary's. Although each ritual remains unique in its form and content, together the rituals establish a distinct form of communication and contribute to a process of schooling at St. Mary's which can be labeled "School-as-Order/Structure." The rituals both reinforce communication as an orderly sequence of events and structure the way children become socialized into the schooling process. (Author/RS)

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Rituals: The structure of schooling at a Catholic elementary school

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Running Head: RITUALS

Abstract

This ethnography examines the practice of rituals as the pervasive form of communication at St. Mary's Catholic elementary school. Four specific rituals illustrate this communication process: morning assembly, "Pass the pen," "Sparkles," and "Yes please/No thank-you." Morning assembly begins each school day, involving the entire student body and faculty. The other three rituals represent typical rituals of the fifth grade class at St. Mary's. Although each ritual remains unique in its form and content, together the rituals establish a distinct form of communication and contribute to a process of schooling at St. Mary's which I label "School-as-Order/Structure." The rituals both reinforce communication as an orderly sequence of events and structure the way the children become socialized into the schooling process.

Rituals: The structure of schooling
at a Catholic elementary school

Journal entry:

Thursday 8:20 am

Morning assembly:

The morning bell rang at 8:25 am. The children all lined up according to class and their teachers escorted them to the courtyard for morning assembly. Mrs. Boles, the principal, greeted the children with "Good morning boys and girls." She then proceeded into the morning prayers. . . . The first announcement is made by Ms. Boles. Some children were running around last night at the open house. Ms. Boles expressed her "disappointment" because that kind of activity is unsafe. . . . She concluded that if children didn't know how to behave, then further night activities would be cancelled."

At the foundation of a school lies a structure of communication which guides the members of that speech community through the schooling process. The form of communication that St. Mary's Catholic elementary school practices pervades the atmosphere of the school.[1] From my first day of observations at the school, I witnessed the first of many different rituals that St. Mary's members participate in throughout the school. These rituals involve the entire student body or remain limited to an individual

classroom. However, each ritual works collectively toward a common goal at St. Mary's. These rituals pay honor to a specific notion of schooling: "School-as-Order/Structure." For the members of the St. Mary's speech community, schooling is an orderly and structured process carried out seriously by each member. This ethnographic study examines four different rituals at St. Mary's. The morning assembly ritual involves the entire student body and faculty, occurring daily. The other three rituals--"Pass the pen," "Sparkles," and "Yes please/No thank-you"--are typical rituals that a student in the fifth grade at St. Mary's experiences during a week. All of these rituals construct a process of schooling which socializes the students and teachers toward a notion of "School-as-Order/Structure."

Definition of ritual

This study reinforces the prevalence of rituals within Catholic schools that McLaren (1986) reports. He explores schooling as a ritual performance. As McLaren notes, these rituals at St. Mary's provide the students with "blueprints for both 'thinking' and 'doing'" the process of schooling (p. 215). Within the beginning days of my observations at St. Mary's, it became clear to me that rituals function in an important way during the school day. The following research questions emerged during my first set of observations. The research questions address how rituals, as a form of communication, function in the speech community of St. Mary's.

R.Q. 1: How do the rituals at St. Mary's function in the process of communication?

R.Q. 2: How do the rituals relate to the process of schooling at St. Mary's?

Philipsen (1987) defines ritual as "a communication form in which there is a structured sequence of symbolic acts, the correct performance of which constitutes homage to a sacred object" (p. 250). This definition addresses the performative nature of a ritual; a performance which works to a specific goal. The performance of a ritual becomes as significant as the "sacred" object it honors. Philipsen suggests that the form of the ritual "provides for the celebration of what is shared by participating in known sequences of coordinated action, which, by definition, require--and, once enacted, implicate--the exploitation of shared rules" (p. 251). A ritual reflects and reinforces the shared rules of a speech community. Turner (1980) argues that a ritual "may inscribe order in the minds, hearts, and wills of participants" (p. 163). As a means of communication, a ritual embodies the essence of structure and order.

McLaren (1986) develops an extensive definition of ritual from which he bases his ethnographic study. He argues that a ritual functions as more than a collection of signs and symbols. "A group or community's rituals become, inter alia, the symbolic codes for interpreting and negotiating events of everyday existence" (p. 36). A ritual

acts as a communicative structure which influences and directs the social construction of reality within the speech community. Instead of representing a static entity, a ritual reveals a fluid process that acts as a framing device for understanding the speech community that performs it. McLaren also reinforces the performative force of a ritual; a ritual is "inherently dramatistic" in nature.

The notion of human action as inherently dramatistic originates with Kenneth Burke (1966). He analyzes human action through a "Dramatistic screen" which is a "technique of analysis of language and thought as basically modes of action rather than as means of conveying information" (p. 54). By framing the rituals at St. Mary's as modes of action, a process of schooling emerges which addresses the significance of education at St. Mary's.

To understand the significance of the communication rituals that pervade the speech community of St. Mary's, I explore the four rituals of morning assembly, "Pass the pen," "Sparkles," and "Yes please/No thank-you."

St. Mary's Catholic school

St. Mary's Catholic school is located in a small university town in the western United States. St. Mary's originated in 1965 with only three grades taught by three teaching sisters from the Daughters of the Holy Spirit from Putnam, Connecticut.[2] Each year the school added one grade until St. Mary's became established as an eight grade elementary school in 1978. The last teaching religious

sister left the staff in 1982, leaving an all lay teaching staff. Currently, in 1991-92, the teaching staff consists of all women, including a female principal. The one exception is a male teacher aide. However, I never saw him while I observed at St. Mary's.

St. Mary's is located one block away from a local public elementary school, the town's one public high school, and the city library. Adjacent to St. Mary's school is St. Mary's Catholic Church. A modest, middle-class residential neighborhood surrounds these buildings. The school buildings of St. Mary's sit off the street behind a stretch of green lawn and trees. Instead of one connected building, St. Mary's consists of four separate buildings clustered together. Behind the main elementary school cluster sits the junior high building. There is a parish hall as well as a religious education center on either side of the school. The parish hall originally housed the teaching sisters, but now is used as an auditorium by the school.

St. Mary's is best described as a small parochial school. It has an enrollment of two hundred sixty-five students in kindergarten through eighth grade. Each grade fits into one class, although sometimes that translates into a large class. This year the fifth grade class has thirty-five students. St. Mary's functions first as a parish school for the local Catholic church. St. Mary's also draws from two regional parishes which do not have schools associated with them. Finally, St. Mary's accepts children

of non-Catholic background, provided the children and their parents understand the students are required to participate in the curriculum and events of St. Mary's which include religion, Mass, and daily prayers.

For this study I conducted two sets of observations at St. Mary's. The first set of observations occurred from January 14 through March 5, 1992. The follow-up observations occurred from May 7 through June 1, 1992. My observations usually lasted two hours, primarily during the mornings. Although during the second set of observations, I was able to come during the afternoon. I conducted a total of twenty-one observations.

My observations included the all-school morning assembly, the upper grades' (fourth through eighth) weekly mass, and the fifth grade class of Ms. Jones. My entry was negotiated for the fifth grade class so I spent the majority of my time in that classroom. I had no restrictions on the days nor times to observe. Ms. Jones frequently told me to come whenever I wanted. In the classroom, I sat at the front next to a small table where I could take notes. Twice I sat in the back of the room to gain a different perspective of the classroom. I did not use any recording devices, but instead relied on my notes, informal interviews with the children and Ms. Jones, and a formal interview with the principal, Ms. Boles to gather information. When possible, I captured "talk" verbatim which I place in quotation marks. Other talk is paraphrased from my notes.

During my second set of observations, Ms. Jones read and commented on my write-up. Her comments are addressed later in the analysis section.

First, I will describe the four rituals, then analyze how they develop a culture of schooling at St. Mary's.

Morning assembly ritual

The setting

The setting of the morning assembly plays an important role in the ritual. One reason morning assembly happens is because of the unique physical structure of St. Mary's. Morning assembly occurs in the inner courtyard of the school (see Figure 1). The three buildings of classrooms and one building of administrative offices form a square, leaving an outdoor courtyard in the middle. Each classroom door opens onto the courtyard, along with the teachers' lounge in the administration building. Outside, a sidewalk encompasses the courtyard, with a sidewalk running through the grassy, inner courtyard, up to a cement platform. On the edges of the grassy area, strings of benches form L-shaped sitting areas. Behind the cement platform, a raised, brick planter holds bushes, small trees, and white, fern-like flowers. The courtyard not only literally functions as the center of the school, but it also functions figuratively as the "center" where the children and teachers pass one another, mingle and talk, and enter their separate classrooms, the teachers' lounge, rest-rooms, or library. The courtyard acts as the central anchor and focal point of the school.

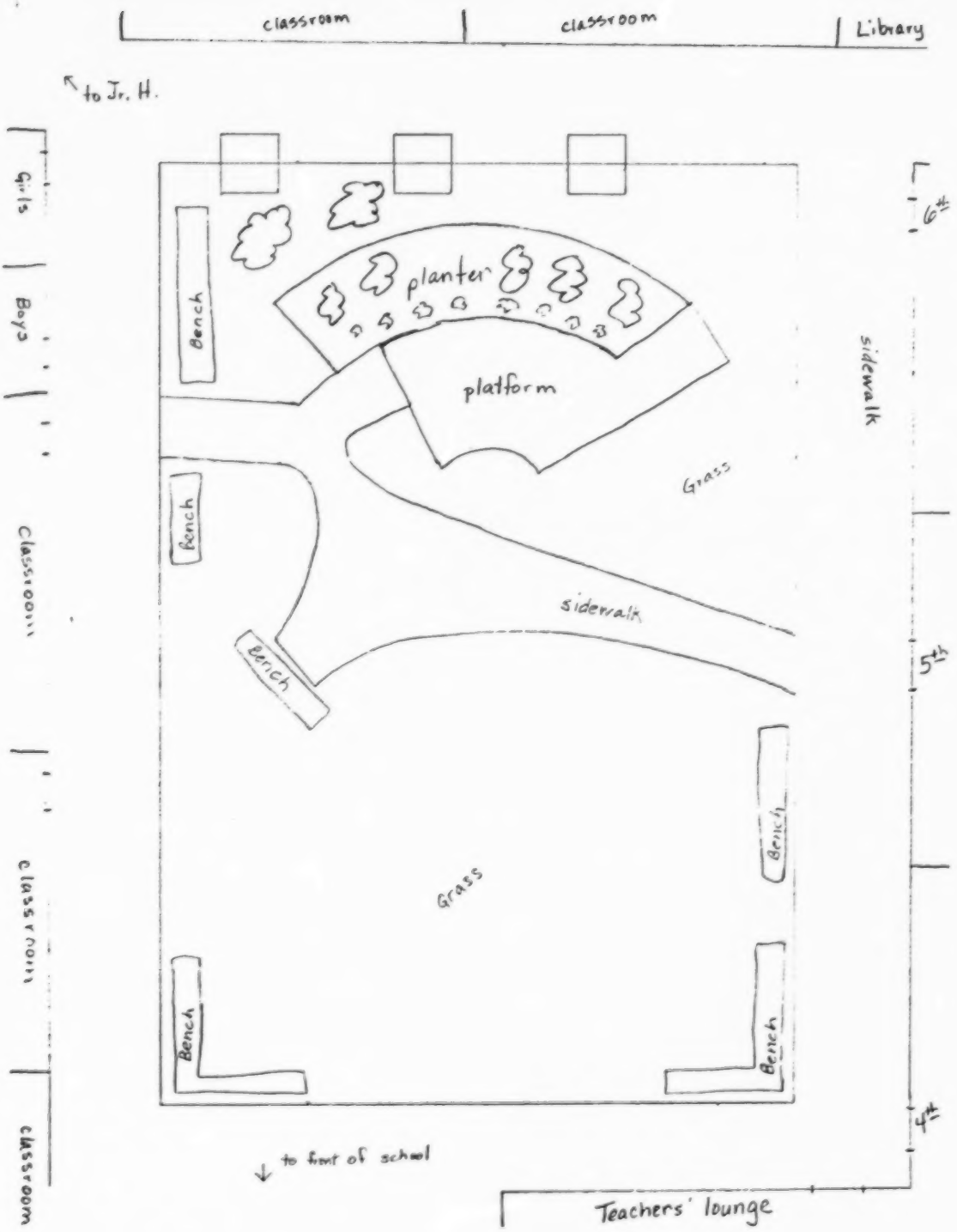

Figure 1: The inner courtyard of St. Mary's school

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It draws students, teachers, and visiting parents together as a unified community.

The stages

The morning assembly ritual proceeds through six stages which I label: call to order, greeting, prayer, pledge, announcements, and dismissal. A typical morning assembly ritual occurred on my first observational day at St. Mary's. I arrived at 8:15 am and found Ms. Boles in the administration building. She introduced me to Ms. Jones, the fifth grade teacher who's class I would observe. This is Ms. Jones' fourth and last year at St. Mary. We briefly talked as we left the teachers' lounge to gather the children from the playground.

Promptly at 8:25 am, the first grade teacher rang an old-fashioned hand bell with a wood handle, a signal to the children to line up for the beginning of school.[3] Each morning, the children play outside on the basketball courts and playground; participate in choir practice; or cluster in small groups to talk with friends before the start of school. The children grades kindergarten through sixth form two lines--boys and girls--in front of their respective teachers. Ms. Jones often adjusts her students by moving them in place to form a more straight and orderly line. One morning a teacher had not yet arrived on the playground when the bell rang, yet her students still lined up where she normally stood.

The lines proceed across the blacktop court according to grade; the kindergartners stand closest to the school building, working down to the sixth grade who line up farthest from the building. The exception is the junior high. The seventh and eighth graders stand off to the side near the kindergartners, forming a loose line, but more like a semi-circle.

Each teacher leads her group of children to the courtyard. The morning assembly begins about 8:30 am. Most children stand quietly as they wait for the principal, Ms. Boles, to approach the platform. If the children continue to talk or play around with their friends, the teachers will "Shhh" them, usually with a finger to their lips, until they become silent and stand still. At first it appeared that the teachers gave this quiet signal in general to all the students. But as I focused on the two teachers who stood closest to me, I observed that they glance quickly around at their group of students, and then take action if they think one of their students is causing the noise. One morning a boy in Ms. Jones' class continued to bounce his ball in the courtyard. Ms. Jones quickly took the ball from him, and he immediately stood still. She also touched some children on the shoulder who were talking to each other and not facing the stage.

Ms. Boles walks briskly through the students from the teachers' lounge, carrying a small, portable public address system. She stands in the center of the courtyard on the

small cement platform. The children surround her in a semi-circle about ten feet from the cement stage. Usually the noise decreases when the children see Ms. Boles.

The first stage of the ritual begins with the call to order. To quiet the children down, Ms. Boles raises her free hand in the air, pointing her palm out to the audience as if she is giving a signal to stop. Immediately, the youngest children respond by mimicking her raised hand. The teachers also follow with a raised hand, then glance around at their own class of students to determine if they are continuing to talk and not paying attention during this first part of the assembly ritual. Ms. Jones usually tells her class "Put your hands up." The junior high students never raise their hands, and only a few fifth graders from Ms. Jones' class raise their hands. Almost all the younger children, probably through the fourth grade, raise their hands. Even though the older children do not raise their hands, they become silent like the children who do raise their hands. Often this first stage lasts no more than ten seconds, although it can last longer if the children do not settle down. When Ms. Boles decides the children are quiet enough, she moves directly into the second stage of the ritual.

Ms. Boles greets the children with "Good morning boys and girls." The children respond by remaining silent. This second stage lasts as long as it takes Ms. Boles to utter her greeting. She moves directly into the third stage.

Ms. Boles immediately announces "Let's say our prayers and pledge." During the assembly, she speaks into a small microphone while holding the amplifier. She opens the prayer stage of the ritual with "In the name of the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit." While she recites this prelude, everyone makes the sign of the cross, except for Ms. Boles because she holds the public address system and the student next to Ms. Boles on the platform who holds the small American flag. Then the children and teachers join Ms. Boles in unison, praying out loud:

> My God I offer you this day, all I shall think, do, or say; Uniting it with what was done on earth by Jesus Christ your Son. Amen.

This prayer concludes with "In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." This time everyone says the phrase as they make the sign of the cross instead of only Ms. Boles. After this collective prayer, a student comes forward to read a prayer. The different grades take turns being responsible for this second prayer. The second prayer is read from a book or off a piece of paper. Ms. Jones chooses prayers from a book titled Someone's There. The following in an example of a prayer from the book:

> We pray for those who have no work, no friends, no home, for the victims of violence and for all those in need of our prayer. Please, God, help us together make a better world for all.

One day during the first graders' month of leading prayer, a girl read a short prayer from a piece of paper held in front of her by her teacher. Ms. Boles held the microphone close to her mouth, but her voice remained soft and the prayer was difficult to hear. The first-grader's mother stood in the audience with her camera. She snapped two or three pictures of her daughter up on stage. Afterward, Ms. Boles greeted the mother and they talked.

Even though different classes took responsibility for the second prayer, I witnessed two morning assemblies which did include this second prayer.

After the prayers, Ms. Boles immediately moves into the fourth stage--the Pledge of Allegiance. All of the teachers and most children place their right hands over their heart and face the flag up on the platform to recite the pledge. They say the words slowly, with careful pronunciation, as they do for the opening prayer.

From the beginning of morning assembly through the pledge stage, the conduct of the children and teachers in the courtyard creates a "formal," reverent-like atmosphere. The content of the first four stages encourages this "formal" demeanor in the assembly. The sacred status of God and the United States flag require a formal atmosphere. Respect for authority by following Ms. Boles' call to order also positions the children to assume a formal, reverent attitude. However, as soon as the pledge concludes, the

behavior of the children and teachers changes drastically, creating a more "informal" atmosphere.

I stand with Ms. Jones' fifth grade class during assembly. The fifth graders no longer remain still; they talk quietly to each other; and they pick-up their bags or backpacks which lay outside the classroom door. However, if they make too much movement and noise, Ms. Jones tells them to "Shhh" or comes over to a student and holds him/her still. Even though morning assembly is not finished, the last two stages assume a less formal tone in both content and behavior than the first four stages possess.

In the fifth stage, Ms. Boles relays any announcements that apply to the student body. One day she announced that Friday will be Valentine's Day so the children are permitted to wear jeans instead of their regular blue and white uniforms. But she qualified the announcement by adding to the girls that they are forbidden to wear "leggings" (a popular style of pants among the school girls). Other examples of announcements include: basketball practice in the afternoon; all school dance at night; the school's brownie social; a upcoming fire drill; and the sixth grade Medieval play.

Ms. Boles always asks the audience if anyone has an announcement so the students and teachers do have an opportunity to come forward and make an impromptu announcement. In the case of the basketball practice announcements, the coach came forward to make the

announcement one time and a player made the announcement another day. However, most of the announcements come from Ms. Boles or are known to Ms. Boles prior to the assembly. I did attend one morning assembly at which there were no announcements. However, that is a rare occurrence.

Every Friday marks a special addition to the announcement stage. Every student who celebrates a birthday during the week or has a "half-birthday" (the six-month mark of a birthday) receives a birthday balloon from the student council. The council members walk out from the teachers' lounge with balloons attached to strings as soon as announcement time begins. Ms. Boles then calls the birthday students up to the platform from a list of names she reads off a card. Usually two or three student council members pass out the balloons to the students. Finally, Ms. Boles goes around to each student and has the student say his/her name and grade into the microphone. After the children announce their names, Ms. Boles dismisses them back to their group of classmates.

During the announcement stage of morning assembly, Ms. Boles may use the time to issue reprimands and warn the students about future improper actions. During my second week at St. Mary's, the school hosted an all-school brownie social on a Wednesday evening. On Thursday morning, Ms. Boles expressed her "disappointment" to the children because during the brownie social some children ran around outside in the dark through the parking lot. While the children ran

around, some cars exited the parking lot and Ms. Boles expressed how unsafe the children acted. Then she emphasized that she had requested the children (actually a group of boys) to stop, but they proceeded to run around and disobey her message. She said she would not list names in front of the students because "you know who you are." She concluded, "If children didn't know how to behave, then further night activities would be cancelled."

On another day, Ms. Boles warned the children of a fire drill scheduled "sometime" that day. She cautioned the students that a fire drill is "serious business." They must not run, talk, or misbehave because "if there every was a real fire, they must not look like clowns trying to get out of the building."

Sometimes Ms. Boles uses the announcement stage of the ritual to share classroom activities. During the month of February, the sixth graders studied the Medieval period. Ms. Boles asked the sixth grade teacher how "her sixth graders are doing." The teacher responded, "Wonderfully!" Ms. Boles reminded the students that they will see the sixth graders' Medieval play on Friday. On another day during that month, the sixth graders came to school dressed as clergy--monks, nuns, brothers, and sisters. Ms. Boles was not present at morning assembly, but a junior high teacher lead assembly and commented to the sixth graders: "I hope you sanctify our school with your presences."

After the announcements, Ms. Boles concludes the morning assembly with "Have a good day." This short final stage of the ritual signals to the students the end of morning assembly. They make the transition to the classroom by gathering their books, backpacks, or bags, and entering their classrooms. The children anticipate this final closing remark with careful attention. As soon as they sense Ms. Boles will say "Have," they immediately shift out of the morning ritual performance.

Depending on how many announcements there are and the behavior of the children, morning assembly lasts from four minutes to fifteen minutes. The weather also may affect morning assembly. If the rain is light, morning assembly continues. However, heavy rain cancelled morning assembly one day. If there is an all-school mass (usually the first Friday of every month), then morning assembly occurs after the mass. With these exceptions, morning assembly occurs daily and sets the stage for the rest of the school day at St. Mary's.

Morning assembly functions as a reference point for the entire school day. Its placement at the beginning of the school day sets the tone for a day of schooling at St. Mary's. Morning assembly progresses through six different stages. Those stages simplify into two distinction phases--formal and informal. However, even the informal phase of morning assembly remains <u>more</u> formal than the transition period into the classrooms after morning assembly. Even if

the stages vary in length or are omitted, the two phases remain intake. These phases emphasize the primary importance of placing the formal content of God and country before the informal content of school-related issues.

After morning assembly, the children enter another setting--their classroom. The following three rituals represent some of the rituals that a fifth grade student participates in during a typical week of school.

Fifth grade rituals

Pass the pen

"Pass the pen" occurs during the morning English lesson. Ms. Jones frequently uses the overhead projector to display sentences for the students to work out. Ms. Jones selects a student and "passes" the marking pen to the student. That student goes up to the projector, marks the sentence, and then gets to choose who works the next sentence. The student completes the sentence on the projector in less time than it takes him/her to "pass" the pen.

The transferring of the pen engages the entire class. Before the student with the pen "passes" it to the next person, the children call out his/her name and add "Me, me!" or "Yo, yo!" or "Give it!" Most children perform this ritual with great verbal and physical vigor. Their eyes widen with anticipation. The more aggressive students stain their arms in the air and nearly fall out of their seats.

The children who don't receive the pen, sigh loudly or say "Oh, oh" or "Gosh."

During one English lesson, Ms. Jones repeated to the students one important rule of "Pass the pen:" "But remember, only two boys in a row [or two girls]." When two boys or two girls have had the pen in a row, then the children join in to remind each other of the rule: "You have to pick a boy this time" or "You got to choose a girl." Generally, the boys will pick a boy if they can and vice versa. Ms. Jones ends "Pass the pen" by retrieving the pen when the last sentence has been completed.

Although I only witnessed "Pass the pen" twice while I observed at St. Mary's, my interviews with Ms. Jones and some of the students establish this as a patterned and significant ritual within the fifth grade classroom. During an interview, Ms. Jones explained to me that "Pass the pen" began early in the school year when the children complained about not being picked by her to work out a problem on the projector. Ms. Jones created "Pass the pen" to eliminate this problem and prevent the children from accusing her of playing favorites. "Pass the pen" occurs when Ms. Jones uses the projector, but I noticed a derivation of "Pass the pen" which practices the same notion of equality in "Pass the pen."

When Ms. Jones wants the class to participate in a lesson by either reading from the textbook or working a problem from the textbook out loud, she will call out

various children's names as she walks up and down the rows of desks. She carries a stack of three by five cards in her hand along with her textbook. Each child's name is written on one card. Ms. Jones flips through the cards and calls out the name that appears on the next card. Although the children do not participate in this ritual with the same enthusiasm as they do in "Pass the pen," this ritual contains the same premises of equality and fairness that characterize "Pass the pen."

"Pass the pen" functions not only as a means toward classroom fairness, but also one moment when the children assume an "authority" role in class because they are allowed to choose the next participant. This requires the children to make certain judgments and evaluations as they select the next participant. "Pass the pen" also reveals the deliberate choices on the part of the children which may reflect popularity or favoritism. Even though "Pass the pen" eliminates some classroom discrimination, it cannot eliminate it entirely.

Sparkles

"Sparkles" functions as a pre-spelling test ritual. Ms. Jones announces there is time to play "Sparkles." "Let's see who's ready to play," she challenges. The students sit still in their desks, some even put their heads down. Ms. Jones calls the students by rows (when the row is quiet) to form a circle around the classroom. She begins "Sparkles" by saying one of the spelling words for the test.

The child to her left gives the first letter of the word, then the next child adds the second letter, the third child continues with a letter, and so on until the word is completely spelled. When the final letter is given, the following child calls out "Sparkles" to the child on his/her left. The "sparkled" child "loses" and must go sit down. If a student misjudges the end of the word and calls out "Sparkles" on his/her turn, then he/she must go sit down. During the spelling of a word, if a given letter is not correct, Ms. Jones will call out "No" and the child who contributed the wrong letter must sit down. The next child in the circle begins the word from the beginning. The circle of spelling continues until the circle diminishes to two children. The child who gives the last letter is actually the loser because the second child then calls out "Sparkles." The winner of "Sparkles" receives a sparkly pencil from Ms. Jones.

"Sparkles" engages the children physically like "Pass the pen." During "Sparkles," the children become more "active" as the numbers in the circle shrink. In one journal entry I note:

> The children move around more, walk in small circles, swing their arms, jump up and down, seem anxious, when the numbers dwindle down to just a few students. The make more comments like "Ohhh" or "Yes" (especially the boys) when they miss out on "Sparkles" and remain in the game. Their eyes widened when they must add their

letter and when they anticipate the end of the word and "Sparkles." When the end of a word comes and someone must sit down, the boys jump up and down, smiling because they are still in the game or their friends are still in the game. Sparkles lasts about 10 minutes. The boys seem to engage in large body movements (arm swinging) and loud vocal expressions ("No") during "Sparkles," while the girls tend to express their participation through their posture (tension in the body) and their facial expressions (wide eyes, tension in the face). One boy Brian always makes a joking comment when he is "sparkled." He says statements like "You'll see my lawyer!" or "This is communism!"

During one round of "Sparkles," I formulated three rules from comments that Ms. Jones made during the ritual. The rules are: 1) The children must speak loud enough for Ms. Jones and the rest of the class to hear. Ms. Jones said, "If I don't hear the letters, I can't tell if the next person is right or wrong." The second rule and the third rule relate: 2) Only speak when it is your turn, and 3) No helping out a student with a word. When the students become too noisy, Ms. Jones reminds them to stand still during "Sparkles." If a student does give a clue to another student, a new word is started and that student must sit down.

Based on the excited reaction and intense participation, especially by the boys, "Sparkles" obviously

is a favorite ritual among the fifth graders. "Sparkles" combines a cooperative event--collaboration on a spelling word--with a competitive edge--one person must sit down (lose) after each word. The children simultaneously work together and compete against one another. They perform as a group, except as the end of the word approaches. Then the group disengages and the children anticipate who will be "sparkled" alone. During all of this, Ms. Jones maintains the orderliness of the ritual.

Yes please/No thank-you

Classroom "housekeeping" business occurs every morning between the end of morning assembly until approximately 9:00 am. This period of time contains a number of micro rituals, but I want to focus on "Yes please/No thank-you." After the children have entered the classroom and put their books and bags away, Ms. Jones gains order and quiet by counting to five. She begins one, two, threee, fouurrr (slows down), five. By the time she reaches five, the children are in their seats and quiet. Often, if the children do not quiet down immediately, Ms. Jones adds "four and a half" in order to get them quiet by the time she reaches five. I never witnessed a time when the children did not become quiet by five.

Once the room is quiet, Ms. Jones takes roll and begins lunch count. For hot lunch count, she stands at the front of the class by the small table and says to the class "Yes please or no thank-you" while she glances at the chart.

Then she calls out by name the students who have a hot lunch card in the lunch folder. A response of "yes please" indicates the child wants hot lunch and "no thank-you" signals no hot lunch. The only exceptions in these responses are when a child takes two hot lunches or when he/she wants milk only. Then the student will response with "May I have two lunches?" or "Milk, please." Otherwise, all the students response with either one of those phrases.

As morning assembly sets up the school day, "Yes please/No thank-you" opens the classroom day with an emphasis on politeness and respect for the authority figure. It sets up the proper demeanor that the children must practice within their classroom setting.

"School-as-Order/Structure"

The morning assembly, "Pass the pen," "Sparkles," and "Yes please/No thank-you" illustrate four different rituals the students of St. Mary's perform. Rituals pervade and structure the process of communication at St. Mary's. Weekly Mass, Pig skin review (a football-like game played before every science test), lunch time prayer, "1,2,3,4,5" are other examples of rituals at St. Mary's. To analyze rituals, McLaren (1986) suggests asking an important question: "In what ways do school rituals uncritically transmit the dominant ideology?" (p. 83). After observing these rituals, interviewing students, Ms. Jones, and Ms. Boles, and receiving Ms. Jones' response of my analysis, I suggest that these rituals function together to pay homage

to the sacred idea of "School-as-Order/Structure." This sacred idea, which also reflects the dominant ideology of St. Mary's, becomes honored through both the form and content of the rituals.

A ritual involves a performance which occurs repeatedly, in a similar sequence and form. By communicating through rituals, the St. Mary's speech community engages in one level of "School-as-Order/Structure." School becomes "Order/Structure" because the pervasive form of communication is the ritual. As the children learn the correct performance of these rituals, the ritual socializes them into a particular schooling process at St. Mary's. Each member of St. Mary's plays a role in the rituals and learns to communicate through his/her role. During the morning assembly and three fifth grade rituals, Ms. Boles and Ms. Jones, respectively, play the role of "spectator" and the children respond as "performer." Scollon and Wong-Scollon (1990) coin similar terms--spectator and exhibitionist. I substitute my term "performer" which captures the essence of their term "exhibitionist" but avoids the implications that "exhibitionist" suggests. Scollon and Wong-Scollon explain the hierarchical nature of the roles:

> For American English speakers, the person in the superordinate or dominant position is the spectator and the subordinate person is the [performer]. . . . There

> is no doubt at the same time that the teacher is in the dominant or superordinate position. (p. 265)

When the roles of both the principal/teacher and students in the morning assembly are performed correctly, they reinforce a hierarchical order within the school.

This hierarchy becomes apparent in the fifth grade rituals. "Pass the pen" is performed by the students and watched by Ms. Jones. She intervenes only when the children do not perform correctly. In "Sparkles," Ms. Jones also does not participate in spelling the words. Instead, the children perform around the circle by contributing a letter to the word, and Ms. Jones monitors the rules of the game. During "Yes please/No thank-you" the children's courses of action are limited to two responses. By providing them with the phrases "please" and "thank-you," Ms. Jones indicates the standards of proper behavior that promote respect and politeness. The children's task is to correctly "perform" one of those responses.

The setting or "stage" of the ritual also contributes to the notion of "School-as-Order/Structure." During morning assembly, the children must stand near their classroom door, yet still remain on the sidewalk. They must stand with their classmates rather than children from an adjacent class. During one student interview, Joseph and Brad indicated that they must stand together as a class so "there won't be chaos." In another interview, Jackie and Nicki added that you stay together as a class so "you don't

talk." One student, Alisa, believed the purpose of morning assembly is to "calm the students down" before class. The staging of morning assembly establishes order among the participants of the ritual.

Ms. Boles believes the outdoor court yard lends itself nicely to an assembly. If the school had a different arrangement, then she thought morning assembly might not happen. Her role as spectator of the ritual allows her to stand on the platform during morning assembly. She regulates who may join her on the stage. If a student assumes a role that day such as flag-holder or prayer-reader, then he/she may stand on the platform. Also, if Ms. Boles opens the floor up to general announcements, then a student may walk up to the platform. Except for those special cases, the children remain confined to their parts of the setting on the sidewalks, and Ms. Boles stands alone on the platform. The ritual balances on the correct structure of the participants within the setting.

In the fifth grade classroom setting, the room appears orderly and neat. All the desks line up in straight rows; Ms. Jones collects homework papers completed on the same white paper by all the children and leaves them in tidy piles on the front table; and the book shelves display organized groups of textbooks. Ms. Jones monitors the penmanship of the children carefully so they produce clean and precise writing on assignments. One day she instructed a boy to redo his homework paper because he was goofing off

and using messy, large penmanship to do his homework. The classroom of the fifth graders exudes order and structure. When the children participate in their different rituals, they do it within a carefully structured and orderly environment.

The content of the rituals also supports the notion of "School-as-Order/Structure." The morning assembly ritual contains both prayers to God and a pledge to the nation. The institutions that embody these sacred figures--the church and government--are characterized by order and structure. The children pay honor to not only to God and their country, but also to what God and the United States represent; an established, formalized "order" in their lives. The children must participate in the school Mass at St. Mary's Catholic Church next door. The entire Mass ritual embodies a symbolic and sacred structure which the children perform on a weekly basis. The children indicate that the pledge not only shows respect for the country, but also unity. Matt feels the pledge shows respect because "you are thankful for the soldiers fighting for our being free." Nicki believes that the pledge "shows unity" and is like "paying attention and feeling proud of our country." Joseph and Brad both agree the school recites the pledge in morning assembly "because it is patriotic." As a part of morning assembly, the pledge privileges the unity and order of the United States and the prayers reflect the structure of the Church.

"School-as-Order/Structure" also emerges through the focus on "recognition" that Ms. Boles emphasizes during morning assembly. Ms. Boles describes morning assembly as "a time for recognition; to start the morning positively; give the day a celebratory focus; and to motivate the children to do some learning." She recognizes the students at morning assembly through the birthday balloons on Fridays; "trash awards" for children who collect one bag of trash from the school grounds; and certificates to students who make the honor roll and principal's list. Students also become recognized through leading the second prayer. The earlier example of the mother taking pictures of her first-grade daughter reciting morning prayer indicates a dual recognition of the ritual on the part of the school and the parents.

By recognizing the students' participation in the school, Ms. Boles views the children as an integral part of the overall structure of St. Mary's. Without the children's participation, St. Mary's would cease to exist. The children, subsequently, receive rewards for participating in the "order" of St. Mary's. Their "performer" role includes being good individuals, good students, and good citizens.

The focus on student recognition also comes through in "Pass the pen." Ms. Jones reinforces the two boys or two girls in a row limit, encouraging an equality between genders. "Pass the pen" extends the burden of recognition to the students by forcing them to choose whom they will

recognize with the pen. This recognition process also illuminates who the children ignore. Those who never receive the pen, or only on a rare occasion, are denied recognition within the classroom through this ritual.

At the end of "Sparkles," Ms. Jones recognizes the "winner" of the game by awarding him/her with a pencil. The winner of "Sparkles" is less an indication of a good speller, and more a matter of chance based on the length of a word. If you misspell a word, you must sit down. However, most children sit down because they stand next to the person who gets to pronounce "Sparkles!" Chance contributes more to the recognition of a winner than actual spelling ability.

Ms. Boles' view of a "good education" which she articulates during morning assembly influences and reinforces "School-as-Order/Structure." She believes a good education at St. Mary's means being serious about school. "School is a serious business and it is the students' responsibility to be serious about their role as a student." She tells the students "just like their parents go to work, they must treat school as their jobs." The process of schooling at St. Mary's must not be taken lightly by the children. The structure and order they observe within their parents' occupations links with their role as students at St. Mary's. More importantly, schooling at St. Mary's socializes the students for their life in the world of work.

Edson (1982) reports a transformation in the schooling of the United States at the turn of the century which directly related to the increasing industrialization of the nation. Teachers encouraged their students to develop a sense of loyalty and individualism toward their jobs. They taught their students a "sense of career that would lead to permanence and stability in the workplace" (p. 147). Edson quotes James Gilbert's conclusion: "In the United States education and not politics was the principal arena in which the issues of modern industrial capitalism were joined" (p. 147). This school/work nexus continues in the process of schooling at St. Mary's.

A poster at St. Mary's illustrates this school/work nexus. Outside the main school office hangs a poster that shows four children dressed in clean, neat school clothes, carrying books and lunches. In the background, superimposed, stands four adults, assumedly the four children later as adults. These four adults wear professional clothes. Three people wear well-pressed suits and one male is dressed in a clerical collar. Below the pictures, a caption states: "The success of tomorrow begins today. Catholic Schools." The children both hear and see evidence that their performance at school directly affects the success of their future careers. The children express this understanding most clearly through their concern with a "good education."

All ten fifth graders that I interviewed used the phrase "good education" (without prompting by me) as one component of their schooling at St. Mary's that distinguishes them from other schools. They define good education as caring teachers who will "talk to you about almost anything." A good education also means strict teachers who "disciplined more" and, therefore, the students pay "more attention and learn more." A good education also equals more work in class and more homework in comparison to their friends who attend public schools. The children have internalized the notion of a good education. The process of schooling at St. Mary's both influences and reflects this internalization by the children.

According to Ms. Jones, one reason many students are concerned with attaining a "good education" is their focus on attending a good Catholic high school after St. Mary's. The three area high schools (one all-boys, one all-girls, one co-ed) maintain high standards for acceptance. The competitiveness of the schools is discussed by the fifth graders. The two criteria for admittance are the grade point average from sixth through eighth grades and a recommendation from an eighth grade teacher. The best way to receive a good recommendation is to maintain proper behavior, an important component of the process of schooling at St. Mary's.

One theme that recurs daily at St. Mary's is proper behavior. The opening journal entry of this paper reveals

Ms. Boles' emphasis not only on "safe" but "correct" behavior by the students at the school social. If the children cannot behave in the proper manner, then they must suffer the consequences of no further night activities. Ms. Boles addresses another issue of appearance during the morning assembly one the day of the scheduled fire-drill (see page 17). She tells the children they must not run around. Not because it isn't safe, but because they might look like "clowns." Clowning around is not the proper behavior for St. Mary's students.

During another assembly, Ms. Boles complimented the children on their "great job" in the all-school play, especially "their behavior in the green room." She added that discipline is a difficult thing to master, but that you will use it all your life. At that same assembly, the first grade teacher made a similar announcement. She told the children that she was "very proud" of them for their "mature behavior" at the play. The children learn as early as kindergarten that the practice of proper behavior elicits praise from the teachers. Ms. Boles' comments also implies that this behavior is something they must master for their future careers.

The reprimands to the students during morning assembly indicate a breach in the structure of schooling which is so important at St. Mary's. If a child continues to neglect his/her serious responsibility as a student at St. Mary's, he/she must leave. In one interview, Ms. Boles explains:

> If the student gets into trouble, is truant, or does not take school seriously, he or she will be expelled. I make it clear to the parents in the opening interview what the school is about so that they know the course of action that may result if their child does not follow the structure of St. Mary's.

Structure prevails because those children who deviate are taken out of St. Mary's, in order to preserve that structure. Structure, not students, controls the process of schooling at St. Mary's.

The message underlying "Pass the pen" also reveals the concern for structure at St. Mary's. Although one reason Ms. Jones uses "Pass the pen" is to create a feeling of equality in the classroom, she also uses "Pass the pen" as a learning tool. Ms. Jones stresses that the main reason she initiates "Pass the pen" is to encourage the rest of the class to learn from and focus on the work of the child up front. She explains, "The children become very excited when I do 'Pass the pen' so that keeps them focused on the assignment." Otherwise, she notes, they lose concentration and "go off in space." She finds it difficult with thirty-five students to monitor each individual student during an assignment. While the children may enjoy the fun of "Pass the pen," Ms. Jones views it as a means to contribute to the proper structure of classroom learning--focused attention on the lesson. Furthermore, "Pass the pen" reminds the students of the proper way to conduct themselves during a

lesson. They do not run up to the overhead or shout out an answer; instead they wait, albeit with strained arms in the air, and cajole the "pen-holder" to call on them for the next problem. If a child does the problem on the overhead correctly, Ms. Jones responds with "Good, very good." However, when the child does the problem incorrectly, either she corrects the student or she asks another student to help out.

Mehan (1982) describes the structure of classroom events and phases during a teaching lesson. Mehan labels phases as constituent parts of a larger classroom event. "Pass the pen" is a micro-level example of classroom structure, falling into the "phases" category within the "event" of an English lesson. As a ritual, "Pass the pen" creates an orderly, structured phase within larger classroom events. Morning assembly represents a macro-level focus of school structure. Shultz, Florio, and Erickson (1982) examine the cultural organization of home and school, focusing on how children know when and how to communicate in each culture. Morning assembly reveals a unique form of communication in the culture of one school. Although St. Mary's represents only one speech community, the school's use of rituals reinforces the idea that members of a speech community learn when and how to communicate through complex processes. The rituals of St. Mary's teach the children how and when to communicate within that particular school culture.

Conclusion

One important aspect in the process of schooling stems from the process of communication within the school culture. As McLaren (1986) notes, schooling becomes a ritual performance, and at St. Mary's that relates directly to a process of schooling and socialization into the larger society. Not only do the members of St. Mary's school follow a structured form of communication, but their use of rituals in turn contribute to a notion of school as a structured process. On both the levels of form and content, rituals reinforce the order and structure evident in the communication at St. Mary's.

Ms. Jones' comments on this study confirm the importance of "School-as-Order/Structure." Not only did she concur with the analysis of rituals at St. Mary's, but in our final interview she repeatedly said, "Structure is important." She views structure as a necessary component of schooling. She added that without structure "the children would be in chaos." According to Ms. Jones, they need boundaries and parameters in which to act. Some children require stricter boundaries than others, but all of them need some type of structure. She admitted that she reinforces structure beyond the classroom when she refers to the children's future careers. Their future jobs require a certain order which she believes must be learned presently in the classroom. The children become socializes into the larger society through participating in the school culture.

To socialize into the schooling process which leads to a "good education," the children must correctly perform the rituals of St. Mary's. Failing to pay homage to "School-as-Order/Structure" means failing to participate in the school culture, thus failing to receive an education at St. Mary's.

The performative nature of the ritual adds to the significance of "School-as-Order/Structure." The children socialize into their school culture through a "performer" role. This role enables them to successfully communicate and proceed through the schooling process. Some children do not "perform" up to the standards of the rituals and must leave St. Mary's because they cannot honor "School-as-Order/Structure." The culture of St. Mary's reveals a specific process of education. The rituals establish and promote this combination of culture and schooling.

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Footnotes

[1]The name of the school, teachers, and students are pseudonyms.

[2]This information came from an interview I had with the principal, Ms. Boles. She gave me a brief oral history of Catholic schools in America. She also provided me with a photocopy of a brief history of St. Mary's which was prepared for a self-report on the school.

[3]The handle bell and teachers' whistles comprise the bell system at St. Mary's. I notice the children frequently look at their watches or the classroom clock to determine where they are at in the school day rather than listen for a bell.